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A N S W E R

T O A

P A M P H L E T,

I N T I T L E D,

“ Thoughts on the Causes and Consequences
“ of the present high Price of Provisions:”

I N A

L E T T E R,

A D D R E S S E D

To the supposed Author of that Pamphlet.

By a GENTLEMAN of CAMBRIDGE.

De Republicâ nunquam desperandum.

L O N D O N;

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An A N W S E R

T O A

P A M P H L E T, &c.

S I R,

THE public are certainly under very great obligations to you, for having explained to them, in so clear and satisfactory a manner, the Causes and Consequences of the present high Price of Provisions. You would, however, have added greatly to the favour, had you taken the trouble to point out a method, by which these prices may be somewhat reduced ; or, if that be impossible, how the laborious poor may be
B enabled

enabled to pay them. To know the cause and nature of a disease, is a requisite step towards effecting a cure, as well in politics as in physic; but unless that knowledge leads to a cure, it will be so far from diminishing, that it will rather increase the complaints of the unhappy sufferer. And this effect, most surely, it will ever produce, when we are sensible, that our disease is owing, not to our own folly or negligence, nor to the necessary course of human affairs, but to the ignorance, stupidity, or tr——y of those who are intrusted with our safety. What, let me ask you, would you think of a physician, who, being called to visit a patient lying on a sick-bed, should gravely tell him, that his distemper was occasioned by an unhappy concurrence of untoward circumstances, assisted by some medicines, which the physician himself had given him; but that the malady was incurable, and would soon put a period to his existence,

ence. And what, let me add, can we possibly think of you (whom fame represents as one of our state-physicians) when you very seriously tell us, that the present high price of provisions (the political malady under which we now labour) is owing, in a great measure, to the increase of our taxes, which you yourself have contributed to augment, which you still help to keep up, and out of which you receive the profits, and, what is more, the perquisites of your place.

Indeed, the price of provisions must always be high, and the people of consequence be miserably oppressed, while the expences of government are so enormously great; and enormously great they must ever continue to be, while you, Sir, and such as you (I mean, Sir, no personal reflection; for I believe you are just as deserving as the generality of your brethren) I say, Sir, while you, or any other, enjoy places of

such immense profit for *serving your country*, as you very gravely, though most ridiculously, call it; but, as I would term it, for *serving yourself*.

I doubt not, Sir, but you have already marked me down as one of “those enemies” (as you are pleased to call them) “of all
“government and subordination, so numerous in this country, who fail not to
“avail themselves of every opportunity, to
“spread universal dissatisfaction, and inflame
“the minds of the people to seek redress
“of their grievances by riots, rapine, and
“all kinds of disorders.” This, Sir, is a language at which I am not surprized; as I know it is the common stile of every court-sycophant, from a lord of T——e and Pl——ns to a petty excise officer; from his gr——ce in the drawing-room to his scullion in the kitchen. Or, perhaps, you may take me for one of the opposition, of whom
you

you *politely* say, “ That, knowing themselves
 “ what it is to be hungry, they pathetically
 “ bewail the miseries of the poor.” O ho !
 Sir, so the secret is out ! Every thing in
 the hands of a courtier becomes a matter of
 party. S——me J——ns, Esq; is a lord
 of Tr——e and Pl——ns, and may be in
 danger of losing his place upon a change of
 ministry : *Hinc illæ lacrymæ*. I tell you, says
 he, the present ministry are doing every thing
 in their power to relieve your distresses ; and
 if you will still complain, you are either *a*
hungry retainer of the opposition, or, what is
 yet worse, *an enemy of all government and*
subordination.

Here, Sir, moreover, I cannot help re-
 marking, that if the opposition be *hungry*,
 the ministry must be *full*, and full too, by
 your own confession, at the expence of their
 country : for the opposition, I presume,
 still enjoy their estates ; and some of them
 have

have as good estates, and even better, than S——me J——ns, Esq; so that the only difference between the opposition and the ministry consists in the fatness of the places possessed by the latter : and whence are the salaries of these places defrayed ? Why, from the taxes ; which, you candidly acknowledge, are but too much increased : and by whom are the greatest part of these taxes paid ? Why, by the laborious poor ; from the clammy sweat of whose brows you extract a large share of the profits of your office. The very chairman, that carries you to the h—se, contributes to your support. You have for several years received, and you still continue to receive, your proportion of a half-penny from his every pot of porter. For my own part, Sir, I can truly affirm, that I have not even the most distant connection either with the opposition or the ministry ; nor, if I had, would I sacrifice the interest of my country, to gratify

gratify the avarice, the pride or ambition, of either the one party or the other.

Leaving you, however, at full liberty to bestow upon me whatever name, or to rank me in whatever class, you please, I shall endeavour, in the course of the few following pages, to shew, that the evil, which you, *to our very great comfort*, pronounce past remedy, may yet admit of a cure, if not *radical*, at least *palliative*; and that if the price of Provisions cannot be greatly reduced, the laborious poor may be better enabled to pay them. This, indeed, is a task, the execution of which would have come with a better grace from you, who, as I said above, are one of our state-physicians; but many a patient, you know, has been cured by a *quack*, after having been given over by the whole *faculty*. Before, however, I discover my *nostrum* (you see, Sir, I am beforehand with you in the opprobrious names you will give me and my proposal) I must
beg

beg leave to make a few cursory reflections upon the principal parts of your work.

And first, you tell us, “ that the present
 “ high price of provisions arises from two
 “ causes; the increase of our national debts,
 “ and the increase of our riches; that is,
 “ from the poverty of the public, and the
 “ wealth of *private* individuals.” That our
 national debt, indeed, is increased to an enormous bulk, no one can entertain the least doubt: every one feels it to his cost; and he feels it the more sensibly, as he is convinced, that it has been increased to a degree infinitely beyond what was necessary. With regard to the increase of our riches, or the wealth of individuals, I question much if it be true, either in the proportion you assert, or in the sense you understand it. You say, that our riches have increased (or, which is the same thing, that the value of money has decreased) one third during the present century; and one half at least of that third
 since

since the commencement of the last war. That is, there are now in the kingdom thirty pounds for every twenty that were in it in the year 1700, and for every twenty-five that were in it in the year 1754. That the quantity of money in the world is daily increasing, and of consequence its value decreasing, is a fact that will admit of no doubt, because there are fresh supplies daily coming from the mines, which are converted either into plate or specie. You cannot, however, possibly mean, that the sudden increase of our riches is owing to this general and slowly-operating cause, whose effects, tho' certain, are always insensible in heightening the price of Provisions. But the opulence, you say, of the present times, proceeds "from
 " the immense riches daily flowing in from
 " our commerce, extended over every quarter
 " of the globe, and from the new channels of
 " trade opened with America." To what new quarters of the globe we have of late extend-

ed our trade, or in what respects we have improved our trade to the old quarters, I own, Sir, I am at a loss to determine. The first, I apprehend, is a question, which can be satisfactorily answered by no body; the last can be best answered by our Portugal merchants. As to the *new* channels of trade which we have opened with America, I am glad, Sir, to hear of them; for, unless the public be greatly misinformed, all the *old* channels are, by the wise schemes of you and your coadjutors, almost intirely stopped up. But, pray, Sir, what are these new channels of trade which we have opened with America? To the barren sands of Florida, and the inhospitable desarts of Canada? I give you joy, Sir, of your *new channels of trade!*

You add, indeed, much more ingenuously, but still more absurdly, that the increase of our riches is owing to the increase of our national debt: a most curious paradox,

dox, surely ! and more wonderful than that of the *half being greater than the whole*. For my own part, Sir, I was never afraid to undertake the solution of any mathematical problem ; but this quite staggers my resolution : I must, therefore, leave it to be solved by yourself. I will, however, take upon me to affirm, that, if you mean, as by the whole strain of your reasoning you seem to mean, that the increase of our national debt increases the wealth of the nation in general, you mean a most glaring absurdity ; as the transferring of property from one person to another, and still more the transferring it from the laborious and the poor to the idle and the rich, can never increase the general wealth of the kingdom. But if you mean, as, indeed, if you mean any thing that has the least shew of reason, you must mean, that the increase of our national debt increases the wealth of a few individuals, you are certainly in the right : it increases the

wealth of S——me J——ns, Esq; and of every placeman and pensioner; but does it, for that reason, increase the wealth of a Yorkshire ploughman, or a Norwich manufacturer? I would not have you, Sir, to tell them so to their face, lest, after finding themselves deprived, by the greatness of the taxes, of the produce of their labour, they should not patiently bear such an insult offered to their understanding.

The truth is, the national debt is a very convenient engine for extracting the bread out of the mouths of the industrious poor to feed the dogs and horses of our great men. In sober sadness, Sir, we have too many great men; and some of these great men are by far too great. I am, I assure you, no leveller: I know there must be different ranks and orders in society for the preservation of peace and good government; and I know too, that the greater the state, the
greater

greater must be the distinction between these different ranks and orders : but I affirm, at the same time, that, if peace and good government can be preserved, the greater the equality that prevails among the people, and the less the governors lord it over the governed, the more happy, the more flourishing, and the more contented will that people be.

But our wealth, you say, has increased one-sixth since the commencement of the last war. With regard to the increase of our *imaginary wealth*, I mean of our *paper-credit*, by bank-notes, exchequer and navy-bills, &c. that amounts to the same thing as the increase of our national debt, which is, indeed, amazingly augmented, and the fatal consequences of which are but too apparent. Perhaps too it may be allowed, that our *real wealth or specie* has increased, in a degree beyond what ever happened in any former period of the same extent, by the
rich

rich captures made at sea, and by the treasures found at the Havannah and other places; but whatever wealth we gained by these means, has, it is to be presumed, long circulated through the state: and it is well known, that when any additional sum of money is once thoroughly digested and concocted through the whole mass of the people, it can have no influence in raising the price of Provisions so as to distress them. For money, as you very justly observe, and as Montesquieu, Hume, and many other political writers, have observed before you, is merely a commodity, the value of which decreases in proportion to the increase of its quantity; so that the greater or less quantity of it in a kingdom is of no consequence, taking a state within itself: it only affects foreign commerce, and it has this peculiar property annexed to it, that the greater quantity of it a kingdom possesses, the greater risk does that kingdom run of losing its foreign commerce; because poorer nations
being

being able to work for lower wages, will of consequence undersell it at all foreign markets. It is only its sudden increase or sudden decrease that has any influence upon the internal state of a kingdom: the former, by raising the price of commodities, before the price of labour can be raised, naturally tends to quicken the industry of the people, and to make them active, alert, and vigorous; the latter, by lowering the price of commodities, before the price of labour can be lowered, as naturally tends to slacken their industry, and to make them lazy, indolent, and slothful. So that the sudden increase of money is advantageous, and its sudden decrease disadvantageous to a state, though the first certainly raises, and the last as certainly lowers the price of Provisions: but matters are best suffered to proceed in their natural course; for every thing violent is dangerous, as well to the political as to the animal body.

You

You tell us from Lord Lyttelton, though you have not thought proper to quote your authority, that fifteen shillings at present are of no more value than one shilling was in the reign of king Henry II. But if fifteen shillings can be now earned with as much ease as one shilling was in that prince's reign, this alteration in the value of money makes not the least difference to the people: it only gives them a little more trouble in counting out fifteen pieces of white metal instead of one. I entirely agree with you, Sir, in thinking, that all the complaints against forestallers, regraters, monopolizers, and engrossers, are, in a great measure, groundless; and that whatever effect the arts of those men may have had in raising the price of Provisions, they could have had little or none at all, had it not been for the great increase of our national debt, and, of consequence, the increase of our *ideal money*, or paper-credit.

Since

Since, therefore, it is evident beyond the possibility of a doubt, that the present high price of Provisions arises, not from the extension of our trade, which is rather contracted; not from the increase of our *real money* or *specie*, which is very little augmented; not from the arts of monopolizers and engrossers, which, unless assisted or connived at by the government, can never be dangerous; but from the great increase of our national debt; it follows, that the only method of reducing the former is by reducing the latter. But how, it may be asked, is this to be effected? Not, Sir, as you honestly confess, by taking superabundant wealth from individuals, and with it discharging the debts of the public; for let us never think of maintaining public credit by destroying private justice: nor yet by practising public œconomy, as that virtue has been hitherto practised by our ministers, who in fact seem only to have adopted this word

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with

with a view of gulling the credulous multitude : nor yet even, I am afraid, Sir, by “ narrowing,” in the sense you mean, “ those channels,” (I use, you see, your own words) “ through which riches have flowed in such torrents into the pockets of private men ;” but by narrowing them in a much stricter and more severe sense, and indeed by almost stopping them up : in one word, by diminishing, in almost every article, the expences of government.

Here, however, I cannot help remarking, that, if these channels may be now narrowed, it is a plain confession, that they have been formerly kept too wide. And pray, Sir, let me ask you, who opened these channels? who still keep them open? who are daily opening new ones? and who stand at the mouths of these channels, and receive into their pockets a great part of the riches that flow in such torrents through them? Let any minister or statesman lay his hand upon
heart,

heart, and say, that he has never acted this inf—m—s part, and I will freely pronounce him a patriot; but upon none else will I, without great reserve, before that honourable appellation. You say, indeed, that a great part of this public money has flowed into the pockets of merchants, contractors, brokers, and stock-jobbers: but admitting the fact, these men are much less culpable than the ministers; as it is reasonable to suppose, that they had little or no hand in opening the channels through which this money flowed: and as they saw, that those who had opened them, had opened them chiefly for their own benefit; it was natural for the merchants, &c. to endeavour to come in for a share; and happy was it for the public that they did so, as a rich merchant is always a more valuable member of society than a rich courtier: the latter encourages idleness; the former encourages industry; the latter maintains an useless pack of thirty

or forty lazy domestics ; the former gives bread and employment to three or four hundred laborious mechanics and manufacturers. Not to mention, that, with regard to government-contracts, the distinction between a minister and a merchant is often a mere fallacy, as it is well known, that, in matters of this kind, many of our ministers have acted as merchants and contractors ; or, which amounts nearly to the same thing, would let no merchant have a good bargain from the government without a proper consideration. But these are the *Arcana Imperii*, the *sacred* mysteries of state, into which the *profane* vulgar must not presume to penetrate.

Thus far then, Sir, we are agreed, that the only method of reducing the present high price of Provisions, is by reducing the national debt, and the only method of reducing the national debt, is by reducing the expences of government, or (as you emphatically express it) by narrowing those channels, through which the riches of the public

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have

have flowed in such torrents into the pockets of private men. The only point now to be settled between us is, what we are to understand by those channels, through which the riches of the public have flowed into the pockets of private men: and these, I am afraid, you would confine to the channels through which they have flowed into the pockets of merchants, contractors, brokers, and stock-jobbers; whereas I would extend them likewise to the channels through which they have flowed into the pockets of ministers and statesmen, placemen and pensioners, and all the endless train of court-dependents.

But here again we are stopped in the threshold; for we can never, it seems, go long in the same road. You say, “how
“far these measures,” that is, the narrowing of those channels through which the riches of the public have flowed in such torrents into the pockets of private men (for all the other æconomical measures
you

you recommend are reducible to this general one) “ are practicable, or consistent
 “ with the honour, dignity, or even advantage of this country in other respects, I
 “ cannot determine ; but this I will venture
 “ to affirm, that by no others this calamity,
 “ so loudly and so justly at this time complained of, can ever be redressed.” Strange, Sir, that you cannot determine, whether it be consistent with the advantage of a country to save itself from ruin by the only means by which it can be saved ! Why, truly, Sir, if you are so very backward in coming to a determination, I would never wish you to determine any cause of mine ; because, before you could determine, I might be undone. The right of self-preservation, I imagined, had been unalienable in every individual, much more in every community, because it can never be supposed, that all the members of a community can give their consent to their own destruction : and if those,

who

who are entrusted with the government of the state, should of themselves venture on so desperate a step, and be guilty of this worst kind of *parricide*, the people, I am satisfied, might, with great justice, make them the first victims of their temerity, and sacrifice them to the *manes* of their *murdered* country.

Leaving you, therefore, to determine at your leisure, I will take the liberty of determining for myself, and I, will venture to add, for nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand of the whole body of the people, nay, I may say, for the whole nation in general, placemen, pensioners, and other court-dependents excepted, that it is very consistent with the advantage, and even with the honour and dignity of this country, to save itself from ruin by the only means by which you acknowledge it can be saved, that is, “ by narrowing those channels,
“ through

“ through which the riches of the public
 “ have flowed” (you ought to have added,
 and still continue to flow) “ in such torrents
 “ into the pockets of private men,” and by
 diminishing, in almost every particular, the
 expences of government. But how, you
 will ask, are these expences to be diminish-
 ed? You yourself, Sir, have, in some mea-
 sure, pointed out the method: you say, it
 is by narrowing those channels, through
 which the riches of the public have flow-
 ed in such torrents into the pockets of
private men; that is, as you seem to ex-
 plain it, of merchants, contractors, brokers,
 and stock-jobbers: and I add, it is by nar-
 rowing those channels through which the
 riches of the public have flowed, and still
 continue to flow, in such torrents into the
 pockets of those whom, perhaps, Sir,
 you would call *public* men, I mean minis-
 ters, placemen, pensioners, and all the nu-
 merous train of court-dependents.

My

My propofal (or, if you will, my *Noſtrum*) is this: Let the king, than whom never better prince ruled over a free people, have a royal allowance; and out of that let him not have one farthing to pay but what he pays to his menial ſervants: but let all the other ſervants of the crown, who ought more properly to be called the ſervants of the public, be paid by the public; but let none of their ſalaries, not even that of the firſt lord of the treaſury, exceed one thouſand pounds *per annum*, and let all the others be reduced in proportion: your own, Sir, then will very probably be brought down to one or two hundred. And if the ſettled ſalaries ought thus to be reduced, the perquiſites ought, of conſequence, to be entirely aboliſhed. Perquiſites! why really, Sir, this is a word of a very ſuſpicious meaning: a plain homely ſpun man, I'm afraid, would give it a much coarſer name; perhaps no gentler a one than that of p—c—l—t—n. Suppose your ſervant ſhould contrive to ex-

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tract

tract perquisites from every sum of your money he disburses, what would you think of him? You would, I dare say, bestow upon him some very uncourtly epithet, and dismiss him your service. And pray, Sir, where is the difference between the supposed case of your servant, and that of a minister or place-man extracting perquisites from the money of the public? The public are your masters, and it is with your master's money that you thus make free; and ought you, do you think, in these circumstances, to meet with a milder punishment, than what you would, with great justice, inflict upon your servant? *Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris.* Besides, Sir, you have of late, and with great propriety, abolished the vails of your servants: let them not have it to say, that you set them a bad example; and that while you take away their vails, you still keep your own; and your own too, they may add, which you squeeze out of their pockets; for, whatever ridiculous notions of independance your pride may suggest to you,

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the very shoe-black, that wipes your shoes, contributes to the payment of your salary and your perquisites.

But not only ought the salaries of all places under the government to be reduced, and the perquisites entirely cut off: all sinecures and useless offices should likewise be abolished. And here, Sir, I am afraid, you yourself would run a considerable risk; for, unless I am misinformed, the very board, of which you are a member, is rendered, in a great measure, useless, by the appointment of a new secretary of state for the American colonies. You will, however, I suppose, still continue to receive your allowance of a thousand pounds a year for doing — nothing. And, indeed, Sir, you had best continue to receive it; for, if I am not greatly mistaken, you will have occasion for that, and all the other sums you can collect, against the ensuing general election. The price of votes, you observe (and I dare say you speak from experience) is, like that

of all other commodities, advanced : you have, I make no doubt, already felt it to your cost, and you will, I am persuaded, feel it still more severely for the future. Your constituents, I assure you, at least the poorer part of them, will not easily forgive you that sarcastic expression where you say, *that they are better fed than taught*, which, in good faith, Sir, is far from being the case ; as I am credibly informed they will endeavour to convince you at the entertainment you must give them at the ensuing election, when they will shew you, they say, and shew you with a witness, that, notwithstanding your confident assertion to the contrary, *they are worse fed than taught*, and that however empty their heads may be, their bellies are still more empty.

How far this plan of public œconomy may be carried, or into what various departments of the state it may with propriety be introduced, I will not now take upon me to determine ; but as you, Sir, have taken
the

the liberty to prophecy, I will, in my turn, assume the same privilege, and declare, that by no other method than the one here pointed out, can our enormous debts be ever reduced, the price of provisions lowered, the just complaints of the people removed, or the nation saved from irretrievable ruin. This reformation, besides being attended with a considerable annual saving to the public, will likewise be productive of another good effect. It will prevent, in some measure, those eternal squabbles, which prevail among our great men ; which evidently tend to interrupt the public business, and to lessen the authority of government ; and which, during a time of the most profound external peace, throw the kingdom, or at least the metropolis, into a kind of intestine war. We shall then have a sure and infallible test, by which to judge of the principles of the different contending parties, as there will then be no longer reason (as there is now but too much reason) for saying, that it is not a desire of promoting

ing the interest, but an eagerness to enjoy the spoils of their country, that influences their conduct. Nor let it be objected, (as I have sometimes heard objected) that, if the places under the government are rendered so little lucrative, no man of abilities will condescend to accept of them. Avarice is not the only passion that actuates the human breast: pride, vanity, ambition, (not to mention patriotism) have an equal share; and there will always be found men of distinguished parts and probity, who will be willing to engage in the service of the public, if not to increase, at least to preserve, their fortunes; convinced, as they must be, that in the safety of the commonwealth their own and that of their families are, in the strictest sense, involved.

Perhaps, too, you will say, Sir, that there never was any nation, possessed of such extensive dominions, whose government sat lighter upon the people; but this, I am afraid, is an assertion, which you will find

it very difficult to prove, at least in every particular. Our army in Britain is maintained at as great expence as a French army three times as numerous; and the English fleet, during the late war, required more money to support it than all the Roman legions, which kept the whole world in subjection, during the time of the emperors. A private foldier in the Roman infantry had a *denarius* a day, somewhat less than eight pence. The Roman emperors had commonly 25 legions in pay, which, allowing 5000 men to a legion, makes 125000 *. 'Tis true there were also auxiliaries to the legions; but their numbers are uncertain, as well as their pay. To consider only the legionaries, the pay of the private men could not exceed 1,600,000 pounds. Now the parliament, in the last war, particularly in 1760 and 1761, allowed for the fleet 3,640,000. We have therefore 2,040,000 (a sum by far too great) for the officers and

* Tacit. Ann. lib. 4.

other expences of the Roman army. There seem to have been but few officers in the Roman armies, in comparison of what are employed in all our modern troops, except some Swiss corps. And these officers had very small pay : a centurion, for instance, only double a common soldier. And as the soldiers, from their pay, bought their own cloaths, arms, tents and baggage † ; this must also diminish considerably the other expences of the army. So much lighter, at least in this respect, than our own, was that mighty government ; and so easy was its yoke over the whole world. Nor will it avail you, Sir, to say, that the greater expensiveness of a modern army is owing entirely to the greater plenty of money ; for, according to the opinion of the best politicians, money, after the conquest of Egypt, was nearly as plentiful at Rome, as it is at present in the richest of the European kingdoms.

In as little stead, Sir, will it serve you to alledge, that it is absolutely impossible, with

† Tacit. Ann. lib. 1.

such a plan of œconomy, to maintain, in a due degree, the dignity of government. For, if the dignity of government consist, as it most certainly does, in the spirit, the integrity, and capacity of the governors, and in the happiness, the prosperity, and liberty of the governed, the dignity of government may be much better maintained with this plan of œconomy than without it. But if the dignity of government consist, as many of you governors would willingly persuade us, and your base-spirited dependants are ready to admit, in the pomp, the splendour, the wealth and magnificence of the governors, and in the poverty, the wretchedness and slavery of the governed, then it is impossible, with such a plan of œconomy, to maintain the dignity of government: but, in that case, I affirm, that the French government has more dignity than the English; the Turkish government more dignity than the French; and the Mogul's government, perhaps, more dignity than all

F three

three put together : for that *conqueror of the world*, or *ornament of the throne*, as he styles himself, has his guard frequently mounted with 20,000 men at a time ; and the sooner, therefore, we arrive at that *military kind of government* (towards which, indeed, we seem to be hastening with very large strides) so much the better : you will then, Sir, be no longer troubled with *hungry oppositions*, or *enemies of all government and subordination* ; for upon all such miscreants you may, with great ease, and, I dare say, you will think, with no less justice, inflict the most severe and exemplary punishment.

F I N I S